



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

*****NEWS RELEASE*****

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**Burmaster urges Joint Finance Committee
to keep education a top priority**

MADISON—In her testimony Thursday to the Joint Committee on Finance, State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster thanked Gov. Jim Doyle for making public education a top priority in his 2007-09 budget.

“Education is the foundation of democracy and economic security,” Burmaster said. “In this increasingly competitive global economy, I hope the committee will support much of the governor’s budget proposal so we continue to make education our No. 1 priority.”

Burmaster testified in support of proposals in the governor’s budget to

- increase the number of elementary schools offering world languages;
- provide resources for schools to develop science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) instructional programming, targeting female students and students of color;
- provide additional reimbursement to districts that transport students more than 12 miles to school;
- provide start-up grants for districts starting 4-year-old kindergarten programs;
- increase low-income per pupil aid for the Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program to \$2,250 and allow new schools with higher poverty levels to enter the SAGE program starting in the 2008-09 school year;
- provide a revenue limit exemption to assist school districts in development of teacher mentoring programs and support incentives for master educators to teach in the state’s highest poverty schools;
- provide outreach and intervention activities at the state’s residential schools for students who are deaf, hard of hearing, or blind and visually impaired; and
- provide \$1.9 million for Public Library System Aid and increase funding for Library Service Contracts that cover Wisconsin Regional Library for the Blind and Visually Handicapped contract services.

“We must invest in programs and practices that work,” Burmaster said. “Early education through 4-year-old kindergarten, smaller class sizes for our youngest students through SAGE, and

(more)

support for quality educators in our classrooms are proven strategies that will increase academic learning for all children and close the achievement gap. Too many districts are struggling with funding issues that impact their ability to provide these and other vital services for our children.”

Burmaster also expressed her support for the governor’s proposal to maintain bilingual-bicultural aid, increase school breakfast aid reimbursement, and provide state funding to fulfill the department’s responsibility to administer statewide assessments. She commended the governor’s aid proposal for special education, but asked the committee to provide categorical aid at the \$75 million level so the state’s reimbursement hits the 30 percent benchmark. “By increasing special education aid, school districts will face less pressure to reallocate funds under their revenue limit from regular education to cover special education costs,” she explained.

To support Wisconsin’s rural schools, which serve 44 percent of the state’s students, Burmaster asked the committee to add a sparsity package to the budget that would provide aid and flexibility for smaller, rural districts. “These districts lack economies of scale and struggle with declining enrollment and poverty—multiple pressures that make it difficult to sustain a quality education for their children,” she said.

Burmaster also endorsed a new revenue limit exemption to address school safety issues and asked the committee to expand the governor’s school safety proposal to include all school districts.

“Many of the governor’s budget proposals support our New Wisconsin Promise to ensure a quality education for every child and close the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students, students of color, and their peers,” she said. “We all know that investments today in education will pay big dividends in the future for our state.”

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NOTE: This news release is available electronically at < http://www.dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpi2007_31.pdf >. A transcript of State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster’s prepared testimony to the Joint Committee on Finance is available at < http://www.dpi.wisconsin.gov/sprntdnt/pdf/2007_jfc.pdf >.